

Mercersburg Water Authority Meeting
Borough Hall, Mercersburg, PA 17236
April 17, 2025
MINUTES

ATTENDING: Vice-Chairman Jason Frey, Member Joe Creighton, Member Dr. Michael Pedersen, Member Jacob Morgan, Borough Manager Dawn Scheller, Water & Sewer Plant Laborer Donnie Keefer, Administrative Professional Pete Stotemyer, Solicitor Sam Wiser via phone

ABSENT: Chairman Ed Twine

GUEST(S)/PRESS: Reference Sign in Sheets

Vice-Chairman Jason Frey called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and opened the floor to Public Comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Andy Abel from Mercersburg said that asked about the possibility of putting in hiking trails and eventually a park at the Buck Run Treatment Plant when he heard that the reservoir was going to be de-commissioned, and the response from the Water Authority was a hard “No”. He said the Chairman Twine told him that no one else has expressed interest on the subject, but he would take it into consideration if other members of the community were in favor of it. Abel said he felt that this was a reasonable request and mentioned it to others in the community, and they attended tonight to show their support and voice their opinion about allowing access to the area to the public. He mentioned the area would give the community the ability to participate in various outdoor activities such as hiking and rock climbing. Abel also stated allowing the property to be used as an outdoor recreation area, that it will attract tourists to the area in be a benefit to the local economy. He said that there will be some problems, but they should be manageable. Cumberland County recently did a similar project, and he thinks that they could provide assistance in how to move forward. Creating a community organization, a 501C3, or a parks and recreation department could be options to proceed with the project. The Water Authority could lease or sell all or part of the land to the state park system as well. He said that projects like this bring the community together and provide a sense of common purpose, and opening up the space is the will of the people.

Mayor Pedersen stated that response from the Water Authority is not a hard “No”. Some members are supportive of the idea, and the authority is divided on the issue. Member Creighton commented that the “No” response was until the new water plant is built because of the heavy machinery that will be operating in the area.

Preston Spahr, 101 S. Main St Mercersburg commenting via phone, recognized the work that the Water Authority has done to ensure that the Borough has a supply of water in the future. He mentioned that in the Comprehensive Plan it was discussed about creating tourism infrastructure and would be an economic benefit to the community. Funding recommendations and resources were included in the Comprehensive Plan. The process of opening up the property for public use would require multiple steps, and it can’t be the burden of the Water Authority to make sure that these things happen. Spahr stated that involvement by a third party, possibly a non-profit, would be needed to assist with the process. Once the Water Authority reaches a consensus on moving forward with the plan, Spahr said that he would volunteer his time to make it become a reality.

Chris Duffy, 100 Academy Dr Mercersburg stated that he is the Director of the Outdoor Education Program at the Mercersburg Academy, and he was the Superintendent of one of the largest county parks in Maryland. He said his department takes young people hiking, climbing, and mountain biking

every day in the spring and fall after school. He said there are very little land resources for these activities, and most of the time is spent driving to and from the locations that have access. He is interested in having access to the Water Authority land to get to the state land and to a small cliff for climbing. He said that each term he has 45 students that would volunteer to help make improvements and manage the land. His instructors carry medical and technical wilderness certifications, and he can provide proof if necessary. The activities would be conducted in the safest manner possible.

Michael Brand from Peters Township said that his intention is to start a conversation with the Water Authority so they will take a look at this. He said the engagement process would allow the citizens to understand what the concerns of the Water Authority are with the hopes that the property would be a benefit to the community.

Brent Smith, 14 Oregon St Mercersburg thanked the Water Authority for taking care of the water supply and for keeping it safe and as affordable as possible. Smith said his primary reason for attending was establishing a trail system at the Water Authority property, and that similar projects have been established at other municipalities. He said initially baby steps should be taken and easements could be granted to allow access to the existing trail system on state ground. He also said that the current reservoir could be used once decommissioned for several years without being dismantled.

Vice-Chairman Frey stated that the reservoir is still a current water source, and it supplies approximately 35-50 percent of the water for the Borough. The dam has been deemed sub-standard by DEP, and it requires extensive repair. The current plan is to decommission the reservoir when the Buck Run Plant is improved. Only the original stream will be left. Repairing the reservoir would be a multi-million-dollar project, so the Water Authority hasn't looked at preservation. Solicitor Wiser stated that the repairs needed to the reservoir would be the same whether it is a source of water for the community or not. Preservation of the reservoir has not been under consideration by the Authority since it will no longer be a source of water for the Borough. Andy Abel stated that a similar issue arose at a reservoir in Cumberland County that was being decommissioned was saved by the community obtaining grants and funding to pay for the repairs. Vice-Chairman Frey said that the matter could be included in future discussions. Member Morgan said that it was his understanding that DEP is requiring the dam to be removed, but if it remains the Water Authority would be responsible for upgrading it which would be costly. If the dam is to remain, it should be transferred to the state or another entity so the Water Authority would no longer be responsible for maintaining it. He said that the state should be the primary agent to take control of the property because they would have access to grants and resources to cover most of the funding required to upgrade the dam.

Rich Yale, 11971 BTW Mercersburg asked what the short- and long-term goals and the timeline of the Water Authority are. Vice-Chairman Frey said that the current focus of the Water Authority is to address the all of the concerns presented to the Authority by the State of Pennsylvania and DEP. These include the nitrate removal plant being built behind the elementary school as Phase 1 and the upgrades to the existing plant at Buck Run as Phase 2. Manager Scheller said the timeline for completion of Phase 1 is approximately 3 years, and the timeline for completion of Phase 2 is approximately 3-5 years. Frey said that the permitting process for both projects has been completed. He said that once the production facilities are completed, the next goal is to improve the infrastructure of the distribution system. Establishing a public park at the Buck Run facility is a low priority. Yale stated that he hunts on the state game lands behind the Buck Run facility, and he doesn't understand why there isn't more communication between the Water Authority and the Little Cove

Hunting Club. He currently hikes into the state land from the top, and said there is plenty of room to access the state lands via the right-hand side of the Water Authority property. Donnie Keefer said the property he is referring to is actually Spruce Gap Hunting Club, and the Water Authority hasn't been in communication with them nor does any of the members of the Water Authority belong to the hunting club. Yale said he would be willing to serve as a liaison between DCNR and the Water Authority to allow easier access to the state game lands which are basically land-locked.

Aubrey Hua, 100 Academy Drive, Mercersburg, stated that she is a student attending the Mercersburg Academy. She said that the students and faculty of the Academy are willing to work with the Water Authority as they have the same goals of security, cleanliness, and monitoring of the area. They want to work together as community as the area is part of nature and Mercersburg's identity. She said that Jim and Jeff are faculty members that met rock climbing on the property 25 years ago, and they are still friends today. These are the types of relationships that can be created by having access to the property, and she doesn't want this to be lost. She said that the Water Authority meeting and the public comments has served to bring people together, and access to the property will bring more interaction. She understands the potential for vandalism and mistreatment of the property, but the students are looking to give back to the community not take from it. Safety is their primary concern with outdoor activities along with environmental stewardship. She would like the opportunity to have open-up access to the area, and she is looking forward to working with the Water Authority to make this happen.

Aaron Levell, who was not signed in and address was inaudible, said that he is an avid hunter and interested in accessing the state game lands behind the Water Authority property, but after hearing the students share their concerns, he thinks that they should be given access to use the property. He asked for clarification about the issue of a right-of-way to walk through the Water Authority property. He wanted to know if he would be fined if he parked at the gate and walked back. Vice-Chairman Frey stated that he wasn't sure. Preston Spahr said that you could be ticketed for trespassing on the property, and he received a warning when walking out previously by Mercersburg Police and DCNR. He said that this occurred 20 years ago, but he assumed that the same rules apply today. Solicitor Wiser said that they reviewed this issue years ago, but he couldn't remember the outcome. Vice-Chairman Frey said that this matter should be on the agenda under New Business to be discussed at the next Water Authority meeting.

Rich Yale asked if the Water Authority could select a spokesperson at their next meeting to communicate with the public about the long-term plan for the dam and the Buck Run Facility. The appointed liaison could address questions and concerns of the public. Vice-Chairman Frey, said the Water Authority would also like a single point of contact from the citizen committee to communicate with.

Laura Puckett, 136 Faust St. Mercersburg, said that she home-schooled her kids and used to take them up to the property to study science and nature years ago. She said access to the property would be good for the mental health of students and residents and would lead to socialization within the community. The benefits the area could provide will outweigh the fears of the Authority.

Kalja Harryman, 111 W. Seminary St. Mercersburg, she said she hopes the outcome of the meeting will be to continuous talks between the Water Authority and the public about access to the Buck Run property. Vice-Chairman said that the issue of appointing a member of the Water Authority to act a liaison will be the agenda for the May meeting.

Anthony Miller, 109 Loudon Rd. Mercersburg, asked why the water bills are getting so high. Member Morgan said that the Water Treatment Plant upgrade project is the reason for the increase. In order to fund construction of the new water treatment plants, rates needed to be increased. Miller asked if the recent increase was supposed to be 13%. Manager Scheller said that the most recent bills that were sent had a 20% increase which is the first increase of 2025. Miller said that these increases need to be looked at due to the rising price for water. Vice-Chairman Frey stated he understands the concern, and the Water Authority is not out to make a profit. They are in business to service out debt, and the debt is being driven by the improvements mandated by DEP. He said if the Water Authority discovers that the rates are too high, they would look at reducing the rates. Manager Scheller reviewed the history of rate increases over the last 10 years. The additional funds obtained via the rate increase is being placed in a money market account to pay for the new water treatment plants. The same applies to the sewer rate increase as those additional funds will go towards a new sewer plant project.

Anthony Frisby, 27 North Main Street, Mercersburg, asked which Water Authority members lived in the Borough and were subject to the same rate increases. Member Creighton explained that one of the criteria for being a Water Authority board member was residing in the Borough. Frisby mentioned that Chairman Ed Twine doesn't live in the Borough. Manager Scheller stated that Chairman Twine owns property in the Borough which enables him to be a board member.

Martha Mills, 125 Loudon Rd, Mercersburg, asked if the Water Authority member's bills also increased \$235 which was how much her bill increased. Member Morgan explained that everyone received the same percentage increase, and the usage amount was another variable that affects the amount of each bill. Mills asked if someone could explain the bills to her as she couldn't figure out how her bill total was determined. She stated that everyone's water consumption also increased, and not everyone had a leak at the same time. She just wants the process to make sense. Manager Scheller assisted with explaining the process and gave her the options that were available such as pulling and testing her meter. Member Creighton suggested taking pictures of the reading on her water meter around the times they are read by public works department for quarterly billing and see if the readings are correct. Anthony Frisby said he was told his meter was faulty, and he still got a bill for \$1,059. He said he lives alone 3 days a week, takes one shower, and is gone from the property all day. He said his bills have been between \$180-\$200 for six years, but it has been increasing dramatically over the past year and his bill in January was \$859. He said they pulled out his water meter, told him it was faulty, and they would fix what it should have been, but he still has a bill for \$1,059. He said something needs to be done as there's no way he used that amount of water. Mills said that this is not a rich town, and the residents cannot afford the water bills. Manager Scheller said that the Water Authority will place liens on the property if the owners fail to pay for the water bills. Mills said that can't happen. Vice-Chairman Frey stated that there are hearing about two issues out of 1,300 bills that get sent out, and they will investigate. Manager Scheller explained that anyone that questioned their water bill could call the Borough Office, and PWD would remove the meter and send it for testing by a third party. The results are shared with the resident. If a meter is determined to be faulty, the Water Authority will consider offering an adjustment. Mills asked how the meters were read, and Manager Scheller explained that PWD walks the town and writes down the meter readings. Any meter readings that have abnormally high reading over 20,000 gallons are reread for verification. Mills stated that she knows that the community needs new facilities, but if there were other less expensive options available. She's concerned that people will lose their homes because they can't pay their water bills. Vice-Chairman Frey mentioned he makes the best decision for the Authority based on the

information provided by the solicitor and the engineer. He typically votes for the cheapest but most responsible option on items presented to the Water Authority. Member Creighton again mentioned to residents to take a picture of their water meter to see what the meter is reading, and Manager Scheller gave the time frame the meter are read for billing. Andy Abel asked if it would have been cheaper to tie in to Bear Valley Water. Member Morgan said that it would have been cheaper to provide water from Mercersburg up to 1,900 gallons, and then Bear Valley's rates would have been cheaper. He said trying to conserve water and use less would reduce the best way to reduce the amount of the bill. Anthony Frisby said he thinks that how the meters are read isn't accurate. He said he's been using the same amount of water for years, but now is stuck with a large bill.

Kelly Buterbaugh, 14 Loudon Rd, Mercersburg, opened by thanking the members for serving on the board. She said her water bill went up for this quarter, and she questioned if her rate would increase 40% since she has water and sewer. It was explained to her that it was 20% for both water and sewer, but not 40%.

Teresa Thorn, 19 West Fairview Ave, Mercersburg, said that she is on a fixed income and her bill was \$156 more and the gallons were higher. She asked what the graduated increase will be in 5 years or so because she may not be able to live in the area anymore. Vice-Chairman Frey asked Manager Scheller if estimated future water and sewer rates five and ten years down the road could be available for the May meeting. She responded that it will be difficult to determine because the cost of the project Buck Run project hasn't been decided yet. Vice-Chairman Frey said that he would encourage the citizens of the state to contact DEP concerning their rules and regulations and the economic impact they have on the residents.

Vince McCullough, 112 South Fayette St, Mercersburg, said that it sounds like the folks who served on the Water Authority neglected to do their duties, so now rates need to be made. He asked if people will be priced out of their water usage. Vice-Chairman Frey said that the first water plant is a fixed cost, but the second plant hasn't been priced yet. His hope is to continue to monitor the cost and consider grants that are available. Solicitor Wiser that the Water Authority is applying approximately \$450,000 in grant funds to the current project. It has also obtained \$2,000,000 in grant funds for the Buck Run project. In addition, the Authority continues to seek out new grants that may be available. State and federal grants are being used to offset the cost of the projects. McCullough said that it sounds like the Authority did their due diligence to obtain money, but the increase was an unexpected surprise to many. He also said that the price for the Buck Run project will only increase as time goes by. Vice-Chairman said every meeting the Authority discusses grants, and they employ a service to assist with the process of acquiring grant money. He said that the Authority is very concerned about the price of water, and the impact it has on the residents.

Martha Mills asked if the bills would be increased over the next 2-3 years when construction begins on the Buck Run project or will there be another rate increase prior to that. Vice-Chairman Frey said that they will put the issue on the agenda for the May meeting. Mills asked if there were any other means of communication other than The Journal. She thinks the town needs to improve their technology better connect with the public. We shouldn't be at a point where water bills are \$600-\$800. She feels doomed. She's scared that her kids won't be able to pay their water bills. Manager Scheller explained that TVs are planned to be installed in the conference room, so steps are being taken to improve technology in the office. Member Morgan said that the issue of getting new water meters for the Borough.

Will Willis, 6880 Irwine Dr, Montgomery Township, suggested forecasting for sewer rates as well. Manager Scheller said that sewer rates are tied into water usage, so that will be included in a rate study.

TREASURER REPORT:

Not Available

MINUTES:

MOTION: to approve the minutes from March 20,2025, meeting was made by Creighton, seconded by Morgan, all ayes, motion carried.

ENGINEER'S REPORT:

Not Present

GMS REPORT:

The Park Ave Well Project was mistakenly referred to as Grandview.

WATER AND SEWER LABORER'S REPORT:

Vice-Chairman asked when the issue with the invoice from Negley's going to be addressed. Donnie Keefer said he didn't have any correspondence with Negley's. Manager Scheller said she spoke with Nathan from Negley's, and they are willing to meet with the Authority to discuss the invoices. He will bring the technician with him to help explain the charges. Keefer said that Zimm Well is currently offline, and Manager Scheller said that the issue of the pump that Negley's installed will be part of the discussion.

PUBLIC WORKS:

Written report included.

SOLICITORS REPORT:

Sam Wiser didn't have anything additional to report.

MANAGER'S REPORT:

The quarterly amount billed for the Water Authority is \$226,456.47. A total of 980 accounts received the base user fee of \$23 for a total of \$22,540 with a total of \$4,900 from the increase in the base user fee. The 20% rate increase went into effect this pay period resulted in an additional \$33,953.60. The office will complete a monthly transfer for 20% of the rates paid to move into the money market account which will be done by check. The capital account will be used to pay for the new projects. The total consumption for April 2025 billed was 12,397,000. An increase of 826,000 over last April. Ultimately, there will be a capital account and an operating and maintenance account. Creighton would like to see the difference between production and consumption. Meters are being replaced. There are about 60 accounts that still need new meters installed. The office has been trying to schedule appointments to have these replaced. Lance Hoover should provide a rate study at the next meeting. There have been numerous inquiries to the office concerning the new rates. A usage report for Anthony Frisby's account was included, but we haven't met with the landlord yet about the other properties. Also included was a meter reading sheet, and a copy of his meter testing form from the

third party who conducted the testing. Lance Hoover completed a report showing the meter tested within acceptable limits. Meters are usually put back in if they test fine, but since this meter was approximately 10 years old, the replacement will remain connected. Meters typically are good for 8-9 years. Scheller mentioned that funds collected from the base user fees could be used to replace meters when they have been in service for 8-9 years. The reports for the two EAP remote test meters that were installed were reviewed. There are two types of reports included: hour by hour, and daily usage. Member Morgan had one of the test meters installed at his property, and he was intrigued by the hourly report and the backflow that it showed. Manager Scheller said we have reached a point where we the Authority should decide if they want to move forward with remote read meters or not. This should be scheduled for a future meeting. Member Morgan asked if the remote meter companies had a service where customers could log into a computer program to monitor information from the meters. Manager Scheller said that she would look into it. The office is keeping a list of the calls that come into the office for water-related concerns. The customer bears no cost to have their meter and equipment checked. Morgan mentioned that the issue of monthly billing should be looked into. Manager Scheller said that more PWD and office staff would be needed because of how time-consuming the billing process is. It currently takes about 2 weeks for meters to be read, entered into the system and for rereads to be completed before the bills can be sent. The authority would have to revise the rules and regulations book since it is currently written for quarterly billing.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: to approve Power Maintenance Agreement Quote Q-82292 from Genserve in the of \$1,275 was made by Creighton, seconded by Pedersen, all ayes, motion carried.

MOTION: to approve Water Authority representatives to meet with Negley's Water to discuss invoices received was made by Pedersen, seconded by Morgan, all ayes, motion carried.

MOTION: to accept the Primary Facility Report for the Mercersburg Borough for 2024 completed by Lance Hoover dated March 26, 2025, and acknowledge receipt of submission to DEP was made by Morgan, seconded by Pedersen, all ayes, motion carried.

MOTION: to accept the Water Allocation Permit Compliance Report completed by Lance Hoover dated April 14, 2025, and acknowledge receipt of submission to DEP was made by Pedersen, seconded by Morgan, all ayes, motion carried.

MOTION: to consider the updated Water Treatment Plant at Park Ave Well Construction Proposal from JHA not to exceed \$223,640.06 and approve Water Authority representatives to meet with JHA representatives was made by Creighton, seconded by Pedersen, Morgan nay, remaining ayes, motion carried.

Solicitor Wisner stated that the increase in the funding offer for the Park Ave Water Treatment Plant needs to be sent to PENNVEST. PENNVEST will be meeting next week to approve the funding increase. Therefore, we are not in a position to fully award the contract to PSI. The condition is obtaining all necessary funding for the project.

MOTION: to consider Lance Hoover's recommendation to issue a Notice of Intent to award for

the Mercersburg Water Treatment Plant Park Ave Project to PSI contingent upon solicitor's review and approval was made by Morgan, seconded by Creighton, all ayes, motion carried.

Vince McCullough stated that Pro-tips on "How to Read Your Meter" could be added to the Borough Website. Vice-Chairman Frey said that he would look into this. Member Creighton said that this should be put on the agenda for the next meeting. The Authority discussed the possibility of creating a Facebook page. Solicitor Wisner stated everything that would be involved in the process. The Authority discussed various ways they could communicate with the public including a newsletter or adding updates to the website. Vice-Chairman Frey this issue should be re-visited around June or July.

MOTION: to adjourn at 10:15 PM was made by Pedersen, seconded by Morgan, all ayes, motion carried.

These meeting minutes were transcribed with the use of Pete Stotemyer's meeting notes and have been respectfully submitted for approval.

Date Approved: _____ **Motion Made By:** _____ **Seconded:** _____

Dawn L. Scheller, Borough Manager

SEAL